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SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS REGULATION STRUCTURE IN VIETNAM

1. (U) SUMMARY: RELIGIOUS REGULATION IN VIETNAM IS CHARACTERIZED BY AN EVOLVING BUREAUCRATIC AND LEGALISTIC APPROACH. WHILE THE SRV CONSTITUTION PROTECTS RELIGIOUS BELIEF (AND NON-BELIEF), THE GVN THOROUGHLY REGULATES RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE UNDER THE PREMISE OF MAINTAINING THE LEADING ROLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM (CPV). THE CPV SETS GENERAL POLICY TOWARDS RELIGION, WHILE A SUB-CABINET LEVEL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS (CRA) IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL POLICY. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS HAVE A PROMINENT AND SOMETIMES INVASIVE ROLE IN MANAGING RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES WITHIN THEIR BORDERS. END SUMMARY.

REIGNING ON HIGH: THE COMMUNIST PARTY

2. (SBU) THE MOST RECENTLY PUBLICIZED CPV CENTRAL COMMITTEE DOCUMENT ON RELIGION -- DIRECTIVE 37/CT/TW OF JULY 2, 1998 -- ASSERTS THAT RELIGIOUS FOLLOWERS AND ORGANIZATIONS ARE GENERALLY REQUIRED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE "GREAT NATIONAL UNITY" OR THE "GREAT UNIFIED PEOPLES BLOC." ACCORDING TO A COMMENTARY ABOUT DIRECTIVE 37 ON THE CPV'S WEB SITE, THIS CAN BE "REASONABLY" VIEWED AS THE "NATIONALIZATION" OF RELIGIONS. THE CPV'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE POLITICAL REPORT TO THE NINTH PARTY CONGRESS IN APRIL 2001 DESCRIBED FAITHS AND RELIGIONS AS "THE SPIRITUAL NEED OF A

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SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION." IT ALSO NOTED THAT RELIGIOUS FOLLOWERS ARE "OBLIGED TO FULFILL THEIR DUTIES AS CITIZENS TOWARD THE HOMELAND . . . ." THE POLITICAL REPORT DID NOT REPRESENT ANY CHANGE OF POLICY FROM DIRECTIVE 37; BOTH CALL FOR MORE COMPLETE LEGISLATION ON FAITHS AND RELIGIONS. WHEN ASKED ABOUT REPORTS THAT THE CPV IS UPDATING ITS RELIGION POLICY, CPV AND GVN OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN UNWILLING TO COMMENT, WHILE NOT DENYING THAT A NEW POLICY MAY BE IN THE WORKS.

3. (U) THE CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES OF THE HO CHI MINH NATIONAL POLITICAL ACADEMY -- THE MAIN PARTY SCHOOL -- OFFERS TRAINING TO MID- AND SENIOR-LEVEL CPV MEMBERS, INCLUDING GVN OFFICIALS. (ITS OFFICIALS HAVE, HOWEVER, BEEN UNABLE TO MEET WITH EMBOFFS IN RECENT MONTHS, CLAIMING BUSY TRAVEL SCHEDULES AND OTHER OBLIGATIONS.) THE CENTER ALSO UNDERTAKES RESEARCH AND "THEORETICAL WORK" ON

RELIGION. ACCORDING TO LUU DAT TUYET OF THE ACADEMY'S INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT, THE CENTER "CARRIES ON A DIALOGUE" WITH THE GVN'S CRA. THE CENTER WAS ONLY ESTABLISHED IN THE LATE 1990'S AND APPARENTLY HAS NOT YET TRAINED A LARGE NUMBER OF OFFICIALS, ESPECIALLY BELOW THE NATIONAL LEVEL.

14. (U) CPV OFFICIALS CLAIM THAT THERE IS NO EXPLICIT BAN ON RELIGIOUS BELIEF AMONG CPV MEMBERS, AND OFFER ANECDOTAL ACCOUNTS OF EVEN SENIOR CPV OFFICIALS VISITING TEMPLES AND CHURCHES (ALTHOUGH NOT CLEARLY FOR RELIGIOUS VERSUS TOURIST ACTIVITIES). FEW, HOWEVER, SEEM TO PARTICIPATE OPENLY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE OR ADMIT SUCH BELIEFS. HOWEVER, SIX OF THE 26 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (NA) CANDIDATES IN THIS YEAR'S ELECTION

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WHO DECLARED RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION ARE CPV MEMBERS (1 CATHOLIC, 3 BUDDHISTS, AND 2 KHMER "BA NI"). SENIOR MONK THICH THANH TU, ALSO VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE CENTRAL BUDDHIST SANGHA AND HIMSELF A NON-CPV NA CANDIDATE, CLAIMED TO POLOFF THAT "NO" BUDDHIST MONKS WERE PARTY MEMBERS BECAUSE "MATERIAL CONCERNS" ARE INCOMPATIBLE WITH BEING A MONK. (NOTE: NONETHELESS, VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST MONKS HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL AFFAIRS. END NOTE.) THERE ARE UNVERIFIED REPORTS THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE OFFICIAL CAO DAI AND HOA HAO LEADERSHIP ARE ALSO CPV MEMBERS. THE CPV, THROUGH THE VIETNAM FATHERLAND FRONT (VFF), ENSURES THAT A BROAD CROSS-SECTION OF SOCIETY, INCLUDING RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS, IS REPRESENTED IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AND THIS YEAR'S CANDIDATES INCLUDE BUDDHIST MONKS, CATHOLIC PRIESTS, AND PROTESTANT MINISTERS.

MAKING RULES: THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

15. (SBU) ARTICLE 84, SECTION 5, OF THE REVISED 1992 CONSTITUTION GIVES THE NA THE AUTHORITY TO DECIDE STATE POLICIES ON ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AND RELIGIONS. SINCE RELIGION IS CONSIDERED A "SOCIAL PHENOMENON," SUCH LEGISLATION FALLS UNDER THE NA COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS,

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WHICH IS CURRENTLY WORKING WITH THE CRA TO DRAFT A NEW LAW TO REPLACE GVN DECREE 26 OF AUGUST 19, 1999, PRESENTLY THE PRIMARY LEGAL DOCUMENT ON RELIGION. ACCORDING TO NGUYEN VAN NGOC, CRA VICE CHAIRMAN, THE PRIME MINISTER APPROVED A DRAFT OF THE LAW IN JULY 2001 AND SENT IT TO THE NA STANDING COMMITTEE. THE NA WAS EXPECTED TO HAVE ENACTED THE LAW DURING ITS TENTH SESSION, BUT APPARENTLY RAN OUT OF TIME GIVEN THE DEBATE ON CONSTITUTIONAL REVISIONS, RATIFICATION OF THE BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT, AND OTHER MORE PRESSING ISSUES.

16. (SBU) THE NEW MEASURE MIGHT MORE EASILY BE ENACTED BY THE NA STANDING COMMITTEE AS AN "ORDINANCE" IF IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT THE NEW FULL NA (TO BE ELECTED MAY 19) WILL BE

ABLE TO PASS A MORE AUTHORITATIVE "STATE LAW" IN THE NEAR FUTURE. RELIGIOUS FIGURES, INCLUDING THICH THANH TU AND PAUL JOSEPH CARDINAL PHAM DINH TUNG (ALSO ARCHBISHOP OF HANOI), SEPARATELY HAVE ADMITTED TO POLOFFS THAT THEY WERE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON A DRAFT OF THE LAW IN THE AUTUMN OF 2001. NEITHER, HOWEVER, COULD PREDICT ITS OUTCOME, OFFERED DETAILS ABOUT THEIR VIEWS, OR WERE WILLING TO ASSESS WHAT, IF ANY IMPACT THEIR COMMENTS WOULD HAVE.

17. (SBU) ACCORDING TO THE CRA'S NGOC, THE LEGISLATION WILL CORRECT SOME OF THE RECOGNIZED PROBLEMS WITH DECREE 26, WHICH EVEN HE AND OTHERS DESCRIBED AS "INCOMPLETE." THE UNCLASSIFIED

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LEGISLATION WILL ALSO CLEARLY CONFIRM THE NA'S OWN CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY OVER RELIGIOUS POLICY, ACCORDING TO COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS VICE CHAIRMAN LE QUOC THANH. THANH SAID THAT ONE OF THE PROBLEMS WITH WHICH THE COMMITTEE HAS BEEN WRESTLING IS HOW TO DEFINE "SUPERSTITION." DECREE 26 OUTLAWS SUPERSTITIOUS PRACTICES WITHOUT PROVIDING EXAMPLES. (NOTE: UNDER CPV DIRECTIVE 37, SUPERSTITION IS TO BE "CRITICIZED AND ELIMINATED." END NOTE) NGOC INCLUDED LACK OF DEFINITIONS AMONG DECREE 26'S SHORTCOMINGS AND ALSO LAMENTED THAT THE DECREE DID NOT ALLOW THE GVN TO INSPECT THE FINANCES OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN ENOUGH DETAIL. HE NOTED THAT, IN DRAFTING THE NEW LAW FOR SUBMISSION TO THE NA, THE CRA HAD STUDIED THE LAWS ON RELIGION OF OVER 35 COUNTRIES.

FINAL SAY: THE PRIME MINISTER  
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18. (U) THE PRIME MINISTER HAS ULTIMATE AUTHORITY OVER MANY DECISIONS DEALING WITH RELIGION, ACCORDING TO VARIOUS SOURCES. ONLY THE PRIME MINISTER MAY DECIDE WHETHER TO AUTHORIZE A RELIGIOUS GROUP, SUCH AS IN THE 2001 FORMAL RECOGNITION OF THE SOUTHERN EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIETNAM (SECV). COMPLAINTS ABOUT VIOLATIONS OF THE CONSTITUTIONALLY PROTECTED FREEDOM "TO BELIEVE OR NOT TO BELIEVE" IN A RELIGION MAY BE INVESTIGATED BY THE CRA AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S DIRECTION, BUT ONLY THE PRIME MINISTER MAY TAKE ACTION BASED ON THE FINDINGS OF SUCH AN INVESTIGATION, ACCORDING TO CRA CHAIRMAN LE QUANG VINH. DECREE 26 ALSO RESERVES A NUMBER OF OTHER POWERS FOR THE PM, INCLUDING:  
-- APPROVAL OF APPOINTMENTS TO THE OFFICES OF MOST VENERABLE (FOR BUDDHIST LEADERS), CARDINAL, BISHOP, AND CURATE AND UNCLASSIFIED

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EQUIVALENTS;  
-- APPROVAL OF RELIGIOUS CONFERENCES AND CONVENTIONS INVOLVING MORE THAN ONE PROVINCE;  
-- APPROVAL OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CLERGY TRAINING INSTITUTIONS; AND,  
-- WHETHER TO ALLOW RELIGIOUS GROUPS TO RECEIVE "PURELY RELIGIOUS AID" FROM OVERSEAS.

OVERSIGHT: THE COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS  
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19. (U) WITH A REORGANIZATION OF RELIGIOUS OVERSIGHT BY THE GVN AND VFF IN THE EARLY 1990'S, THE GOVERNMENT CRA WAS SET UP IN 1993 AND REPORTS DIRECTLY TO THE PRIME MINISTER. IT HAS SUB-CABINET-LEVEL RANK AND IS THE LINE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING RELIGIOUS POLICY. IT ALSO ADVISES THE GVN ON RELIGIOUS POLICY. ACCORDING TO NGUYEN THE DOANH, DIRECTOR OF THE CRA INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DEPARTMENT, THE CRA HAS BETWEEN 120 AND 150 EMPLOYEES IN HANOI. (THERE ARE CRA-EQUIVALENTS ALSO ON THE PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT LEVELS WORKING ON THE STAFFS OF THOSE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, NOT DIRECTLY FOR THE CRA. SEE PARAS 14-15) THERE ARE SEVERAL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS, INCLUDING AN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DIVISION RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL CONTACT

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WITH FOREIGNERS.

110. (SBU) FIVE DIVISIONS SPECIALIZE IN THE MAJOR RECOGNIZED RELIGIONS -- BUDDHIST, CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT, CAO DAI, AND HOA HAO (THE LATTER APPARENTLY ALSO COVERS SMALLER GROUPS SUCH AS ISLAM, POSSIBLY THE BAHAI, AND POTENTIALLY ANY OTHER FAITHS WITH FEW FOLLOWERS IN VIETNAM). NOT ONLY DO THESE FIVE DIVISIONS ADMINISTER LAWS ON RELIGION, THEY ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR UNDERTAKING NEGOTIATIONS WITH STILL UNOFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED RELIGIOUS GROUPS. MOST NOTABLY, NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNDERWAY FOR RECOGNITION OF SOME "UNDERGROUND" PROTESTANT GROUPS, SUCH AS THE BAPTISTS. THERE IS NO KNOWN DIALOGUE, HOWEVER, WITH THE UNITED BUDDHIST CHURCH OF VIETNAM, OR WITH CAO DAI OR HOA HAO GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE REJECTED PARTICIPATION IN THEIR RELIGIONS' RESPECTIVE OFFICIAL BODIES. THE CRA ALSO MUST ENSURE THAT ANY RELIGIOUS GROUPS APPLYING FOR RECOGNITION COMPLY WITH ALL OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF DECREE 126. ONCE THE CRA IS SATISFIED (AS WAS THE CASE IN 2001 WITH THE SECV), IT RECOMMENDS A FORMAL DECISION IN FAVOR BY THE PRIME MINISTER.

111. (U) IN APRIL 1999, THE CRA SET UP A PUBLISHING HOUSE UNDER ITS AEGIS TO CENTRALIZE ALL RELIGIOUS PUBLISHING IN VIETNAM. BEFORE THAT DATE, IT WAS POSSIBLE TO PUBLISH RELIGIOUS MATERIALS AT OTHER LEGAL PUBLISHING HOUSES, WHICH  
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ARE NOW FORMALLY BANNED FROM SUCH RELIGIOUS PUBLISHING. THE CRA'S NGOC SAID THAT THE CRA'S PUBLISHING HOUSE BENEFITS RELIGIOUS GROUPS BECAUSE IT HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN DIFFICULT TO GET "PROFIT-ORIENTED" PUBLISHERS TO PRINT RELIGIOUS DOCUMENTS. SOME RELIGIOUS FIGURES HAVE NOTED THAT IT IS NOT NOW PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN BASIC RELIGIOUS TEXTS SUCH AS THE BIBLE OR THE KORAN THROUGH THE RELIGIOUS PUBLISHING HOUSE, ALTHOUGH SOME PROTESTANTS IN HANOI COMPLAINED PRIVATELY IN 2001 ABOUT ONGOING SHORTAGES OF BOTH BIBLES AND HYMNALS. THERE ARE REPORTS ABOUT A PRINTING OF NEW TESTAMENTS, APPARENTLY AIMED PRIMARILY AT THE RECENTLY RECOGNIZED SECV CHURCHES. MOSQUE OFFICIALS IN HANOI NOTED THAT THE PUBLISHING HOUSE HAD ESSENTIALLY PRINTED A KORAN FOR EACH KNOWN MUSLIM IN THE COUNTRY IN 2000 AND HAD NO ONGOING PUBLISHING OF MUSLIM MATERIALS. (NOTE: IT IS ILLEGAL TO BRING IN "REACTIONARY" MATERIALS -- SOMETIMES DEFINED BY CUSTOMS OFFICIALS TO INCLUDE BIBLES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS MATERIALS -- INTO THE COUNTRY FROM OVERSEAS. END NOTE)

112. (U) VICE CHAIRMAN NGOC ADDED THAT THE CRA MEDIATES SPECIAL PROBLEMS FACED BY RELIGIOUS GROUPS. NGOC CLAIMED THAT THE CRA HAD ARRANGED A MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY SETTLEMENT BETWEEN A CARMELITE MONASTERY AND A COMPANY SEEKING TO BUILD A WATER PARK ON LAND WHERE THE MONASTERY HAD CULTIVATED ORCHARDS FOR MANY YEARS. HE CLAIMED THAT THE CRA ALSO ASSISTED RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN THEIR BUREAUCRATIC DEALINGS WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, FOR INSTANCE OVER BUILDING PERMITS. NGOC AND OTHER OFFICIALS HAVE SAID THAT LOCAL GVN OFFICIALS, ESPECIALLY IN REMOTE PROVINCES, ARE SOMETIMES NOT FAMILIAR WITH LAWS ON RELIGION AND "MAKE MISTAKES"; THE CRA  
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HELPS THEM TO UNDERSTAND THE PROVISIONS OF DECREE 26, HE NOTED.

113. (SBU) THE CRA ALSO SUPERVISES CLERGY TRAINING INSTITUTIONS (SEPTEL) IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS WELL AS PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES. RELIGIOUS FIGURES HAVE STATED TO EMBOFFS THAT AT LEAST THE THREE MAIN BUDDHIST ACADEMIES AND SIX CATHOLIC SEMINARIES DO CONTROL THEIR OWN BUDGETS AND THAT FUNDING TO CARRY OUT TRAINING ACTIVITIES COMES FROM THE RELIGIOUS GROUPS THEMSELVES. THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEITHER SUPPORTS CLERGY TRAINING INSTITUTIONS FINANCIALLY, NOR SEEKS TO CONTROL THEIR BUDGETS, ACCORDING TO THESE SOURCES.

DAY-TO-DAY REGULATION: LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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14. (U) UNDER DECREE 26, THE CRA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REGULATING ANY RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES THAT CROSS PROVINCIAL BOUNDARIES, BUT CHAIRMEN OF PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT PEOPLE'S COMMITTEES HAVE AUTHORITY OVER LOCAL ACTIVITIES. SINCE MOST RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES ARE LOCAL, THIS MEANS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CARRY OUT THE BULK OF RELIGIOUS REGULATION. DECREE 26 SPELLS OUT MANY OF THE REGULATED ACTIVITIES, BUT DOES NOT

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ALWAYS SPECIFY THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES. FOR INSTANCE, "THE COMPETENT STATE AGENCY" MUST AUTHORIZE ANY RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE RECOGNIZED PLACES OF WORSHIP OR THE ANNUALLY REGISTERED PROGRAM, BUT WHICH SPECIFIC AGENCY HAS THAT ROLE IS NOT CLEAR. AMONG THE OTHER MATTERS CONTROLLED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE:

- PERMISSION TO ENTER A RELIGIOUS LIFE AFTER BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION (PROVINCE LEVEL);
- REGISTRATION OF A RELIGIOUS GROUP'S ANNUAL ACTIVITIES (E.G. THE ANNUAL CYCLE OF EVENTS AT A PAGODA OR CHURCH) (DISTRICT OR PROVINCE LEVEL);
- TRANSFER OF CLERGY WITHIN A PROVINCE (PROVINCE LEVEL);
- APPROVAL OF ORDINATION OR INVESTITURE OF TITLES OF ANY LEADER NOT REQUIRING PRIME MINISTERIAL APPROVAL (PROVINCE LEVEL);
- APPROVAL OF CONFERENCES OR CONVENTIONS WITHIN A PROVINCE (PROVINCE LEVEL);
- PERMISSION TO RAISE FUNDS (PROVINCE LEVEL); AND,
- APPROVAL OF BUILDING CONSTRUCTION, REPAIR, AND RENOVATION (LEVEL DEPENDS ON SCALE OF ACTIVITY).

15. (U) MOST, BUT NOT ALL, PROVINCES AND DIRECT-RULE CITIES HAVE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES DEDICATED TO RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS THAT REPORT TO THE CHAIRMEN OF THE PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COMMITTEES. THESE OFFICES ARE OFTEN COMBINED WITH ETHNIC MINORITY AFFAIRS OFFICES. THE PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S  
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COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN USUALLY HOLDS GREATEST LOCAL DECISION-MAKING POWER. WHILE CRA CHAIRMAN VINH CONFIRMED THAT RELIGIOUS POLICY IS SUPPOSED TO BE CONSISTENT AND UNIVERSAL THROUGHOUT VIETNAM, HE ADMITTED THAT IN PRACTICE TREATMENT OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS MIGHT VARY CONSIDERABLY FROM PROVINCE TO PROVINCE, DEPENDING ON THE ATTITUDE (OR DEGREE OF KNOWLEDGE) OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES. FOR INSTANCE, UNDER ARTICLE 7 OF DECREE 26, THE CRA'S NGOC NOTED, ONE IS PERMITTED TO PRAY AND CARRY OUT RITES WITHIN THE FAMILY. IN SOME PLACES, NGOC AND OTHERS SAID, LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAVE ALLOWED "HOUSE CHURCHES" TO MEET UNDER THIS RUBRIC, WHILE OTHERS HAVE NOT.

ENFORCEMENT: MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SECURITY  
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16. (U) THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SECURITY (MPS) IS NOT DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, BUT IT PROVIDES

THE MECHANISM TO ENFORCE MUCH GVN POLICY ON RELIGION. ACTING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE SUPREME PEOPLE'S PROCURACY, MPS HAS THE POWER TO DETAIN INDIVIDUALS SUSPECTED OF VIOLATING LAWS, INCLUDING THOSE ON RELIGION, OR MORE NEBULOUS REGULATIONS ABOUT HARMING NATIONAL SOLIDARITY. MPS ACTS TO "ENSURE THE SAFETY AND ORDERLINESS" OF RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS, ACCORDING TO MPS VICE MINISTER NGUYEN VAN HUONG, BUT HE STRESSED THAT MPS HAD NO INDEPENDENT ROLE WHERE RELIGION IS CONCERNED. MPS PERSONNEL ARE WIDELY BELIEVED TO MONITOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS, SOMETHING HUONG CKNOWLEDGED AS PART OF THE MINISTRY'S "NORMAL" FUNCTION.

RALLY THE RELIGIOUS TROOPS: VFF  
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17. (U) ACCORDING O BUDDHIST LEADER (CONCURRENTLY VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE VFF'S RELIGIOUS COUNCIL) THICH THANH TU, THE VFF HAD THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR OVERSIGHT OF AND LIAISON WITH RELIGIOUS GROUPS BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CRA. RELIGIOUS GROUPS WERE WELCOME TO JOIN THE VFF, NOTED VFF GENERAL SECRETARY TRAN VAN DANG. (NOTE: IT IS UNCLEAR IF THE OFFICIAL CAO DAI MANAGEMENT COUNCIL OR THE HOA HAO REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE ARE AFFILIATED WITH THE VFF BUT MUCH EVIDENCE POINTS TO THEIR WORKING IN CLOSE COORDINATION WITH, IF NOT UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF, THE PROVINCIAL VFF IN TAY NINH AND AN GIANG PROVINCES, RESPECTIVELY. END NOTE) AN AUGUST 1999 VIETNAM NEWS ARTICLE LISTED THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIETNAM (NORTHERN), THE VIETNAM BUDDHIST SANGHA, AND THE COMMITTEE FOR SOLIDARITY AMONG VIETNAMESE CATHOLICS AS MEMBER VFF ORGANIZATIONS. RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND RELIGIOUS BELIEVERS ALSO HOLD VFF OFFICES AT VARIOUS LEVELS.

COMMENT  
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18. (SBU) GVN REGULATION OF RELIGION IS EVOLVING AND EVEN

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	DS-00	EB-00	ED-01	OIGO-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	HHS-01	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00
	VCE-00	MOFM-05	MOF-01	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PMB-00
	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/017W

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6464  
INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY  
SECDEF WASHDC  
AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH  
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE  
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV AND DRL/RF

STATE PASS TO USCIRF

SECDEF FOR ABLAGG

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INCREASING IN SOPHISTICATION, WITH NOTABLY MORE FLEXIBILITY THAN A DECADE OR TWO AGO. THE GVN IS GOING TO GREAT LENGTHS TO DRAFT A COMPREHENSIVE LAW ON RELIGION, PERHAPS PARTIALLY IN RESPONSE TO US AND OTHER CRITICISMS REGARDING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN VIETNAM (ALTHOUGH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT REVIEWING THE DRAFT LEGISLATION TO ASSESS WHETHER SUCH GREATER COMPREHENSIVENESS IS ACTUALLY FAVORABLE TO A MORE FREE RELIGIOUS LIFE). A COMPREHENSIVE LAW WITH SPECIFIC REGULATIONS MIGHT HELP MAKE SUPERVISION OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES MORE TRANSPARENT AND LESS SUBJECT TO LOCAL INTERPRETATION. THE BOTTOM LINE ON RELIGIOUS GROUPS -- AS WELL AS ON OTHER SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS -- REMAINS, HOWEVER, THAT IN THE EYES OF THE CPV AND GVN, THE PRESERVATION OF SOCIAL UNITY AND NATIONAL SOLIDARITY, AND OF

THE OVERALL AUTHORITY OF THE CPV, SUPERSEDES PERSONAL  
FREEDOMS WHENEVER THERE ARE CONFLICTS.  
BURGHARDT

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